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Helping children in need

The following is a column by Governor Kathleen Sebelius:

There are few crimes more insidious than child abuse, which is why countless individuals have devoted their careers to protecting children and prosecuting abusers.

But sometimes, the children the system is supposed to protect end up becoming victims a second time as a result of bureaucratic red tape and disorganization.

Child abuse is a complex crime, and it requires the skill and resources of individuals from a range of areas: law enforcement officers and prosecutors; medical and mental health professionals; children's and victims' advocates, and others.

Often these professionals are housed in separate agencies and departments, meaning children are bounced from office to office for different services. That's hard on the children and their families, which is where Children's Advocacy Centers come in.

They provide a single location where children can receive the help they deserve, and also enable investigators and prosecutors to more effectively pursue child abusers. These centers bring professionals from different backgrounds together under one roof with a common mission of helping children in need.

Only 10 of these centers currently exist in Kansas. That means many children don't have access to the help Children's Advocacy Centers can provide. Fortunately, that's changing.

I was in Wichita earlier this month where children's advocates, health professionals and social services providers are working with law enforcement and the district attorney to create a center in Sedgwick County. Similar efforts are underway around the state, and this year the Legislature answered my call to provide state assistance to these initiatives.

Soon, existing Children's Advocacy Centers will receive help expanding their services to reach more children, and new centers will have the opportunity to open in communities that don't currently have one.

This will close the gaps through which too many children fall, and will ensure that victims of child abuse receive the help and support they deserve. In a perfect world, there would be no need for centers like these, but for now, for the children who need this help – it's here.

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